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# French Defense Minister Refuses to Quit

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Reuter

PARIS, Sept. 18—French Defense Minister Charles Hernu, at the center of a political storm over the sinking of the Greenpeace ship Rainbow Warrior, today defied calls for his resignation and said he wanted to establish the truth.

Hernu, accused yesterday by the leading Paris daily *Le Monde* of authorizing the sabotage operation or at least allowing it to take place and covering it up, read a prepared statement to reporters at his ministry.

He protested against what he termed "a campaign of slander" against the French military and repeated his denial yesterday that he had ordered the sinking of the Greenpeace vessel.

*Le Monde* said an unidentified two-man team of French military divers had sunk the Rainbow Warrior in Auckland harbor on July 10. The ship had been due to lead a "peace flotilla" to the French nuclear test site on Mururoa Atoll.

But Hernu denied that the French secret service had any agents in New Zealand other than the five already known, two of whom are in jail awaiting trial.

Alain Mafart and Dominique Prieur face charges of sabotaging the Rainbow Warrior and murdering a Greenpeace crew member who died in the second of two explosions.

Hernu said he bore the responsibility for sending Mafart and Prieur to New Zealand on a mission of surveillance. The two agents "have the right to be presumed innocent," he added.

Opposition politicians have called for Hernu's resignation, and some have also suggested that Prime Minister Laurent Fabius and President Francois Mitterrand should step down.

*Le Monde* yesterday accused former chief of staff Gen. Jeannou Lacaze and his successor, Gen. Jean Saulnier, of having had—like Hernu—foreknowledge of the sabotage operation and hiding the truth from the government's special investigator, Bernard Tricot.

Hernu said the French agents whom he sent to New Zealand to spy on Greenpeace were "only doing their duty in defending the interests of France."

"However, there should be no mistake: there is an abyss between the intelligence mission and the at-

tack of which they are accused," Hernu said.

The defense minister denied that he was using reasons of state to cover up the affair and suggested that his critics were motivated above all by opposition to the French nuclear deterrent.

Paris newspapers said the *Le Monde* story had torn to shreds the official version of the affair, presented by Tricot in his report on Aug. 17.

The editor of the left-wing daily *Liberation*, Serge July, describing it as a French Watergate, said Mitterrand might have to sacrifice Hernu.

"Either Charles Hernu knows what really happened and is hiding the truth, or he does not know, in which case he has totally failed at

the head of the military hierarchy. He is condemned in both cases," July said.

*Le Monde* said Hernu's statement last night fell well short of a categorical denial of its story yesterday that two hitherto unidentified French military frogmen had placed the mines that sank the Rainbow Warrior.

Hernu, who had said last night that "to my knowledge" the secret service had sent no agents to New Zealand other than Mafart, Prieur and the three-man crew of the charter yacht *Ouvea*, dropped the qualifying phrase today and denied the charge outright. However, some Paris newspapers have said the Rainbow Warrior might have been blown up by French Navy divers not working for the secret service.